

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 001583

SIPDIS

DEPT PLEASE PASS TO FAA AND DOT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [FAIR](#) [GH](#)

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON GHANA AIRWAYS CRISIS

REF: STATE 160345

Summary

1. (SBU) DCM, EconChief and FAA Regional Rep Ed Jones met July 27-29 with the Transport Minister and Ghana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) and Ghana Airways (GA) officials to discuss the recent FAA and Department of Transportation (DOT) suspension of GA's service to the U.S. Emboffs also presented reftel points re FAA's request to conduct a reassessment of GCAA safety oversight (reported septel). While many passengers, including Amcits, are stranded in Ghana and the U.S., GA management has focused more on deflecting blame than resolving this situation. GCAA and GoG officials also appear to be in denial. Post will keep up the pressure on GA, GCAA and GoG officials to 1) deal with the crisis, and 2) overhaul safety procedures and oversight. End Summary

Sequence of Events

2. (U) After months of warnings over safety concerns, FAA informed GA and GCAA on July 23 that it had barred one of GA's DC-10s from flying into the U.S. GA disobeyed this order, flying the aircraft into and out of the U.S. on July 24 and in again on July 26, whereupon the FAA grounded the aircraft. On July 27, DOT notified GA that it had no authority to operate to the U.S. because it had allowed its Economic Authority (equivalent to operating license) to lapse.

Post Message to GCAA and Ghana Airways

3. (SBU) Following consultations with DOT, Post delivered the following message to GA and GoG officials: GA allowed its Economic Authority (EA) to lapse and has been operating U.S. routes for roughly 2 weeks without this authority. Before the DOT can reauthorize the EA, it must review GA's ability to provide service to the U.S. in compliance with DOT and FAA regulations. DOT will assess GA's financial capacity and will consult with FAA on safety issues. FAA's ongoing concerns about GoG safety oversight and its decision to bar the DC-10 will complicate the DOT's assessment. Post also reemphasized that this was a separate (albeit linked) issue from the FAA reassessment of GCAA safety oversight (reftel).

Stranded Passengers

4. (SBU) Post initially received numerous inquiries from Amcits stranded in Ghana and contacts throughout Ghanaian society, trying to get information and help colleagues, friends and family. Ghana Airways is reportedly not answering its telephones and not providing helpful advice to increasingly unhappy ticket holders. The number of calls has dwindled in the last 24 hours, and we assume ticket holders are creating their own solutions.

5. (SBU) Post is responding to Amcit inquiries that we understand GA is exploring alternate means of transport (on wet-leased aircraft) and ticket holders should continue to try to contact Ghana Air and monitor news announcements. However, we are also advising them to investigate other options, as it is unclear how quickly GA will be able to arrange replacement flights. (Comment: We understand DOT and State are developing guidance for use with stranded Amcit passengers. End Comment).

Ghana Air comments

6. (SBU) GA officials were unfamiliar with the Economic Authority (or operating license), and asked whether the DOT had proactively invalidated the authority (because of safety concerns), if the DOT had notified the airline that the EA would expire (and whether it should have), the duration of the EA, what kind of paperwork was required, and the procedure to obtain a re-issuance of the EA. They also inquired how they could work around the lack of the EA in order to bring back passengers stranded in the U.S., including whether they could wet-lease an aircraft.

7. (SBU) Post clarified that GA was responsible for allowing the EA to lapse. Post also urged them to deal on these issues directly with the DOT, especially related to finding alternative transport for stranded passengers. (Comment: We understand from DOT/FAA that GA is not working to resolve the

passenger situation as aggressively or creatively as they should. End Comment)

GA and GCAA comments about flights

18. (SBU) GCAA and GA officials argued that they did not receive FAA notification early enough to cancel the July 24 and 26 flights to the U.S. GCAA's Director of Safety Regulations, Edward Akohene, stated that the FAA notified him by telephone on July 23 and was told to expect written confirmation via fax. He says he waited until late that evening and also worked over the weekend, but never saw the fax. GA's Head of Flight Operations, Capt. Johnny Yamoah, also claims he did not see or hear of the FAA letters until Monday morning (July 26), after the GA flight had already departed Accra. (Comment: Akohene says he contacted GA on July 23 to alert them of the ban. Apparently, neither GCAA nor GA officials considered the verbal order not to fly an unsafe aircraft into the U.S. sufficient to actually cancel the flight. End Comment)

19. (SBU) Akohene and Yamoah also claimed that GA safety officials did a "walk around" with FAA officials after the plane landed on Monday, July 26, and the plane appeared to be in good shape, with no obvious corrosion or leakage. Yamoah provided a letter from the U.S. leasing company, BCI, claiming that the appropriate safety checks had been made (emailed to State, DOT, FAA). (Comment: Post will deliver DOT/FAA points refuting these allegations, and clarifying that FAA has had concerns about the banned DC-10 for months. The UK banned this same airplane in early June for similar reasons. End Comment)

Press Reaction

10. (SBU) Local media have reported the facts relatively accurately, relying heavily on DOT's press release. Radio coverage, especially on the call-in shows, have been highly critical of the GoG and Ghana Airways management. So far, we have not heard negative comments or criticism directed at the U.S. GA and GoG officials have obliquely placed the blame for the crisis on the FAA, repeating the above allegations that the FAA fax was late and the leasing company endorsed the safety inspection report.

Comment

11. (SBU) Post is in close contact with GA and GCAA, and is strongly urging them to deal with the passenger crisis first, and then work with the DOT to find a way to renew GA's Economic Authority. Post will emphasize in meetings over the next few days that it is incumbent on GA and GCAA to assume responsibility for disobeying FAA orders to ground the DC-10 and explain what remedial steps they will take to ensure this never happens again. Also, the GCAA and GoG need to take necessary measures to assure aviation safety, especially in light of the upcoming safety FAA reassessment (reftel). Unfortunately, GA management is currently spending more time avoiding blame than addressing the problems.

12. (SBU) Ghana Air is a sensitive political issue, made more sensitive by election year pressures. This latest action is big news here. We expect GA's continuing crisis to get a lot of press and public attention in the short term, and hope that pressure from the Embassy and Washington will make GoG, GCAA and GA officials realize that this crisis is an opportunity to overhaul Ghana Air. Business as usual will likely result in the death of the airline. End Comment.
YATES